

Politics under the Law of God.

A

DISCOURSE

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The following discourse was prepared in extreme haste, and under the pressure of great bodily prostration. It is not offered to the public because it is supposed to have any merit, but because it has been so unfortunate as to be denounced, for qualities positively mischievous and dishonorable to a minister. My purpose, in the discourse, was to make a bold push for principle, as the test of public men and measures, and let the lines, when drawn, cut where they would, disturb whom they would. I recollected that we may say what we will, on this subject, when there is no election on foot and no results are pending. Our hearers are exceedingly fond of high principles, when they have no application. I think I saw clearly, that, if we are ever to have any principle in politics, it must be enforced when there is a question on hand, and results of consequence are to be affected.

I take no pleasure in presenting the discourse to the public. I am compelled to do it by the exaggerated and fictitious reports current concerning it. I hope, too, that the dissatisfaction of some, who were unhappily moved by it, will be abated when they see it under their eye, and have leisure to weigh its statements. They will find that there is not a sentence in the discourse, in which I speak as a politician or a partizan, or transcend the strict limits of moral principle. Within these limits I claim a right to speak on all subjects, a right which every one, I presume, will concede to me. If, on the present occasion, I have seemed to go farther, may not my hearers have carried me farther themselves, by the facility with which they have found an application to my doctrine? That is not my fault, if I have spoken the truth.

It is proper to add, that I have taken the liberty to partially remodel and correct some paragraphs in the discourse, having special care to save the integrity of every sentence and paragraph that could possibly have occasioned dissatisfaction.

I have added a few Notes in this third edition, in further confirmation of my argument.

DISCOURSE.

ISAIAH XXX. 11. Get ye out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us.

THERE is a peculiar propensity in men, when they act in masses, or as public bodies, to act irresponsibly. They yield to impulse, to party spirit and policy, without any consideration of moral constraints and principles. As public bodies, they have no conscience, and the conscience they have as individuals, being one remove distant from an immediate application, and the responsibility divided, has no power sufficient to exert a moral control. Hence they will do, in the mass, without compunction, what they would shrink from as individuals, with horror.

It might have been expected that the Jewish nation, having God for its leader and king, governed by laws directly from Him, sheltered in His bosom, defended by His arm, would be clear of this infirmity. And yet they could never give heed to His will except when they were smarting under His judgments. Even in a time of great public danger and alarm for the national safety, as on the occasion to which my text relates, we find them rejecting God's authority and protection, and trusting in alliances positively forbidden, for security. He sends His prophet, therefore, to denounce upon them defeat and woe. Woe! to the rebellious children, saith the Lord, that take counsel, but not of me, and that cover with a covering but not of my spirit, that they may add sin to sin. Their crime was that they were bent on a treaty with Egypt, and could not be dissuaded from it by the remonstrances of God's prophets and ministers. They told them

to hold their peace, and let the politics of the nation take care of themselves. They said to the seers see not, to the prophets prophesy not. Get ye out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us. Why disturb our policy, or the success of our treaty with Egypt, with religious scruples and saintly dogmas?

I have a message for you, to-day, in which I may perhaps incur the same rebuke. Some of you, I fear, will tell me to get out of the way, to turn aside out of the path, to let politics alone, and let God cease from before you. If so, my duty is not the less plain, and I shall not fear to discharge it as the case demands.

✓ I cannot let politics alone, till I am shown that politics are not under the government of God and beyond the sphere of moral obligation. I claim no right to interfere with public measures or men, except so far as they interfere with or reject the laws of God, nor this as a right to be vindicated, but rather as a duty which I may not shun. It is my duty here, as in all the other matters of life, to follow you and assert God's law, and hold forth the moral principles by which your conduct will hereafter be judged—to rebuke the neglect or contempt of these principles—that the Holy One of Israel may not cease from before you.

It is impossible, in these times, not to suffer the painful impression that, in what are called *politics*—in the choice of public officers, the discipline of parties, the measures and doings of public legislation—our countrymen are becoming fearfully insensible to all considerations of duty and obligation to God. In every other field of moral interest, in matters of temperance, in the religious observance of Sabbaths, in the duties of humanity and public beneficence, the confidence of a general improvement is permitted us. And yet, in a remarkable contrast of degeneracy, we are made to see that politics are becoming every year more insensible to moral constraints and principles. I distinctly remember the time, when there was no such thing as previous concert or agitation to secure the nomination of a candidate to office among us—when the individual to be chosen would have blushed, on the morning of an election, to know that he would be the candidate—when the people came together, and, after a prayer offered to Almighty God for wisdom and direction, began to deposit their ballots. The man who received the greatest

number on the first count, was in that way nominated, and generally led the vote afterward till he was chosen. The question never was, who is the most available candidate? but, with every man as an individual, who is worthy of the place? If there was a citizen, or townsman, who was decidedly superior, in character and competence, to any other, he would be chosen by the silent vote of the people, twenty years or more in succession. There was no stratagem or rapacity, no contract or composition. The whole affair stood as a moral transaction, apart from all political adventure. Then, after the election was made, the honored candidate offered his compliments to the whole mass of voters, in a profusion of wines and brandies; and when all were sufficiently mellowed by indulgence, they repaired to their homes—those, I mean, who were sufficiently sober to go at all.

Now, the whole scene, both in its good and bad points, is reversed. The pulling of wires unseen, and a long and weary agitation, are now necessary to prepare the day. If good men are nominated, it is by the special industry and good fortune of friends. If bad, they will often answer as well, and sometimes better. It is the party that is voted for, with most persons, not the men. Moral considerations have little or no weight, after the candidate is named. Duty, and the fear of God must yield to party allegiance. Even Christian men will deposite their vote for a man notoriously wicked or incompetent, and blush as little as the ink in which it is printed. The whole trial is more generally one of mere physical force, in which the masses are wielded as instruments of political adventure. By force of a great and strenuous moral reform, we are able to send the voters home sober. And yet, by a process of moral degeneracy going on at the same time, we are doomed to regard them as morally drunk at the polls—drunk in the spirit of party—bereft of their personality as freemen, and their moral sense as Christians. How many of the voters, in all parties, at the last or any recent election in our State, can you reasonably suppose to have been governed by a conscious sense of duty to their country and obedience to God? How many did not make a martyr of their conscience, in case they were so unfortunate as to have a bad or worthless candidate offered by their party? Doubtless it was the happiness of some that they had good candidates, the grief of others that they had

not. I indulge in no sweeping denunciations. I only direct your minds to the fact, that our old simplicity is gone, and that politics have become a game of adventure, in which the highest law is **SUCCESS**.

If now we ascend to the public doings of the nation, what great measure is ever decided or pretended to be by moral considerations, or a principle of allegiance to God? Let us glance at a few of the great national questions, such as lie almost wholly within the domain of moral law, and which the plainest principles of God's throne would instantly decide; that we may see, in the review, how far the politics of the nation are under the rule of moral principle.

In the great Missouri question, on which the personal freedom, character and happiness of so many millions of human beings, the honor and security of our liberties, and the moral well being of a vast and fertile section of our territory, were pending, what were the considerations that weighed in the deliberation, and determined the final vote? Was it the immutable principles of justice and humanity—those principles which God asserts and will forever vindicate? No! it was the balance of power between the slaveholding and non-slaveholding States. It was declared and confessed that slavery is a great moral wrong, and political evil, and yet it was decreed that, for the sake of its own jealousy and to fortify its future dominion, it must be and shall be a greater evil. The decision was made, in the open face of God, as an acknowledged violation of his throne. The deep feeling of indignation which then burned as a fire in northern bosoms, is now politically extinct. That sense of injured principle, which was our acquittance before God, has forgotten its injuries. The man who was foremost in that transaction, who therein took upon his soul the sorrows of untold millions of bondmen, and the moral desolation of the fairest portion of the globe, the nation follows with its warmest plaudits, and the promise of its highest honors.*

* It will be seen, at a glance, that I am not assailing Mr. Clay as a candidate. I only show my point, viz.—that the moral wrong of the transaction is now virtually assented to and participated in, politically speaking, by the whole nation. In other words, it is a national sin. We are accustomed, on Fast days, to speak of national sins, and deplore them freely. And if our nation ever was guilty of a sin, it was so in this transaction. I have a right to speak of it and show how far we are conformed to it and contaminated by it. Furthermore, if my object had been to injure Mr. Clay, as a candidate, I should not have assailed the least vulnerable point in his character.

In the Indian question, what did we do but lend the power of the civil arm to crush a defenceless people and their rights? The country which they had received from God and their ancestors, the people of Georgia had gambled for in a lottery, and we executed and sanctified their title by a compulsory removal of the occupants. We violated our most solemn treaties and pledges. We crushed their new civilization; we demolished their new altars of worship; we hunted them as beasts through the forests of their inheritance, harried them down in their flight, and dragged them forth to a new and distant wilderness. God, we knew, was against us. If there was a just God in Heaven, He could not be with us. It was policy—a scheme of internal pacification—a composition with fraud and wickedness which no principle of God could justify. An honored and idolized chieftain at the head of the nation recommended the measure, the nation decreed it, and the military enacted it with their bayonets!

The Florida war was a transaction rooted in unmitigated iniquity and oppression. Long ago, many female slaves had escaped from their masters and fled to the wilderness, where they were received to the wild hospitality of the Indians, and often to intermarriage. The keen-scented rapacity of slavery now sent its man-hunters into the swamps and everglades of Florida, to seize upon their sons and daughters—according to the doctrine that the children of female slaves belong to their masters. The voice of nature in the manly bosoms of these sons of the forest, or rather, I should say, the voice of God, roused them to arms, and they fell, in the vengeance of violated nature, upon the white settlements. The Government of the United States, assumed the ignominious war, and prosecuted it through three civil administrations. The innocent were finally vanquished, and the nation rested in the guilt and ignominy of its victory. There was not one principle of God's bosom that could side with us, not one moral or humane feeling of our own, that could justify us. Our soldiers fought as they were sent to do, and, when they had gained a victory, sat down and wept with their captives, for the guilt of their country!

It is but yesterday, that a rebellion was on foot against the laws of a neighboring State—a rebellion that no principle of obedience to law, inculcated by scripture, or supported by the

reason of morals, could justify. Unhappily there were certain popular sympathies, which it seemed might be enlisted by siding with the movement, and the temptation was too strong to be resisted. Persons in high places came forward to yield it their favor, advancing doctrines which, if generally held, would forever exclude the possibility of an established government on earth. And now that something may possibly be gained, I suppose, to their cause, a powerful body of men in our Congress are endeavoring to cover this nefarious project with their sanction after its fall, and shelter the dead body of the rebellion with a gratuitous and posthumous sympathy. The opposing party, on the other side, speak of the affair with a just reprobation, but they are supposed to speak only as partizans, and their reproofs are destitute of moral power. Never was there a case in which the moral points stood out in bolder relief. It is nothing less than treason on one side, and law on the other. And yet it is remarkable that the moral sense of the country is so dulled, in reference to every thing that can be called politics—moral distinctions are so far subordinated to the power of party discipline, that almost no effect is produced by the agitation on one side, or the just reprobation it meets on the other. I really do not suppose that a hundred votes have been changed in the whole country, either by what has been said for or against this rebellion. And this, too, when there are in the mass of voters probably a half million of professed Christians more or less equally divided between the parties! A most melancholy and frightful evidence of the extent to which American politics have become separated from the law of God and the control of moral principle!

My hearers, it is no unreal or merely fancied evil that I here bring to view, and seek to impress upon you. I do not say these things because it is a fast day and something must be said. I come out before you with a boldness for which some of you may not thank me, but which I dare not, in duty to God and the nation, suppress,—and tell you a plain but painful truth. We are guilty as a nation of the most glaring wrongs, and if there be a just God, we have reason to tremble for His judgments. We are ceasing as a nation to have any conscience about public matters. Even good men and Christians, which is most deplorable of all, are suffering an allegiance to party rule, which effectually demolishes

their personality under the claims of principle, learning quietly to approve, and passively to follow in whatsoever path their party leads. The fear of God is perishing. The impulse of political adventure bears down other and better impulses. Numbers and force are the instruments, success the test, of all public measures, and the amazing interests of our great country, if we do not retrace our steps, are soon to lie at the mercy of irresponsible will, instigated by a rapacity for office and power, which no constitutions or bonds of order can long restrain.

That we may have the whole subject before us, and see it intelligently, I will now state some of the *causes* which have operated and still operate to produce this result.

And, first of all, political power always tends this way. It is so in monarchies,—the court is the place where impiety has its seat. The courtier, who will confess that he is influenced by the fear of God, is derided as a fool. In a republic, where the whole people is the court, the exercise of power has a like tendency. In politics, we exert the prerogative of government, and we expect to act our liberty and do our will. We should not be quite satisfied that we govern at all, if we did not defy the constraints of principle.

2d. We have taken up, in this country, almost universally, theories of government which totally forbid the entrance of moral considerations. Government, we think, is a social compact or agreement—a mere human creation, having as little connection with God, as little of a moral quality, as a ship of war or a public road. We do not say that government, when exerted and fashioned by man, in whatever manner, is forthwith taken by God to be his instrument and ordinance—that it is molded below and authorized or clothed with authority from above—giving thus to law a moral force, and to the civil constitution the prerogatives of a settled or established order. Rejecting such views of government, or never learning to conceive them, it results that law expresses nothing but human will, and that no one is *morally* bound by it. If he chooses to break it and take the penalty, or if he can shun the penalty by concealment, he is guilty of no moral wrong. It also results that a majority may at any time, and in any way, rise up to change the fundamental compact; for

there is no such thing as an established order of the past, endued with a moral authority to bind their actions and determine their legitimate functions. The nefarious doctrine advanced to justify the Rhode-Island rebellion, is, I grieve to say, nothing but the shallow theory of government generally prevalent in this country, *carried out* to its legitimate conclusions. Holding such views of government, it would be wonderful if we did not separate its functions practically from God, as far as we separate them in theory. If our nature were not wiser than our philosophy, we could never feel one sentiment of moral obligation in regard to our duties as citizens. There would be no crevice left, through which a sense of public virtue could leak into our minds. That the views of which I complain are atheistical in their origin, is a well known fact of history, and they show the fact in their face. That they have operated powerfully to effect the disastrous separation of politics from the constraints of duty and responsibility to God, is too evident.

3d. The neglect of the pulpit to assert the dominion of moral principle over what we do as citizens, has hastened and aggravated the evil I complain of. The false notion has taken possession extensively of the public mind, and received the practical assent, too generally, of the ministers of religion themselves, that they must not meddle with politics. Nothing is made of the obvious distinction between the *moral principles* of politics and those questions of election and of state policy which are to be decided by no moral tests. It is the solemn duty of the ministers of religion to make their people feel the presence of God's law every where—and especially here, where so many of the dearest interests of life—nay, the interests of virtue and religion are themselves at stake. This is the manner of the Bible. There is no one subject on which it is more full and abundant than it is in reference to the moral duty of rulers and citizens. Command, reproof, warning, denunciation—every instrument is applied to keep them under a sense of obligation to God. Some of the ministers of religion, I am afraid, want the courage to discharge their whole duty in this matter. Their position between two fiery and impetuous torrents of party feeling, is often one, I know of great weakness, and they need to consider, when they put on their armor, whether they can meet alone one that cometh against

them with twenty thousand. But it cannot be necessary that the duties of the ministry in this field, should be totally neglected, as they have been in many places hitherto, or if it be, we may well despair of our country.

4th. Party discipline is so strong and peremptory among us, that moral considerations and restraints are overborne by it. Men are always irresponsible, when they act in masses. Conscience belongs to the individual, and when all individuality is lost, conscience is lost too. I do not complain that we have parties. It may be difficult to devise any scheme by which it could be avoided.* But, in the name of God and of all that is sacred, I protest against the doctrine that every man shall do what his party appoints, and justify what his party does. It is the worst form of papacy ever invented. And how dreadfully evident is it that the party discipline of our country, irresponsible as it is, and must be, sweeps like a maelstrom round the personality of our people, engulfing men and churches in its dismal vortex. Few men have the nerve to resist it. Their scruples are overruled, they are convinced against their reason, the spirit of the multitude expels the Spirit of God—it is their party—their party is most assuredly to be the salvation of the country—the voices of the multitude and the chief priests prevail, and Christ is crucified!

Once more, the preponderant influence of slavery, in the institutions of our country, is a powerful cause of the result we are deploring. With a population inferior to that of the free states

*But how, it has been asked, can we ever choose a candidate, if we do not go into masses to effect the choice? Do it, I answer, by party combination, strong enough to effect the object. A *party* and a *mass*, as I am here speaking, are distinguishable. A *mass* is a party so consolidated, so melted into one substance, that private opinion, judgment, conscience and choice are lost. A *party*, not a *mass*, is a form of *society*, in which all the individual members bring in their collective responsibilities, judgments and character, acting still as individual persons. But in a *mass*, as I am here speaking, there is *no society*: for *society* implies individual existences, opinions and feelings, associating together on the basis of individuality, combining their wisdom and the results of their private judgment. In a *mass*, personality is gone. It is a passive herd, as pliant to frenzy as to wisdom; as ready for mischief as for good. The whole world, thus condensed into a mass, would not have the wisdom or character of one single man, retaining his judgment, and walking by the rule of his private conscience. And it is in this view, that I condemn, in the discourse, that doctrine of implicit submission to party rule, now growing into favor. It is as great an insult to man, as it is impiety against God. It declares that we exist as citizens, not for reason, choice and duty, but simply to be counted. Its very aim is to make every party a mass, and thus render it pliant to the will of the leaders.

and rapidly decreasing, it is yet demonstrable that slavery has hitherto borne rule in the nation. I saw, but a few days ago, a table of the Presidents and all the chief Officers of State in our country, since the adoption of the Constitution, showing that, in the highest grades of office, at least five sixths of the incumbents have been from the slave-holding states ! I laid the record down with feelings of indignation, shame and grief, that I cannot find words to express—indignation that the lordship of slavery has asserted so effectually the lordship of office—shame that we have suffered it to be so—grief at the discovery that slavery is the characteristic and the dominant power of our country. It was no relief to remember that Virginia, the breeder of slaves, a distinction at once cruel and infamous, has also been the chief breeder of Presidents—as little that the great slave market of the nation is the capital of the nation—as little, nay less, that northern leaders have there conspired, for so many years, to stifle the prayer of freedom in the halls consecrated to equal rights and human liberty. O, my country ! hang thy head and blush over this desecrated name !—a name which thou hast emblazoned before mankind, but hast made a fiction at home, in thy republican slavery !

Slavery being thus predominant in the politics of our country, they have grown as irresponsible, as destitute of conscience, and remote from the fear of God, as slavery would require. The moral deterioration of which I have complained here at the north, has been visibly due, in no small degree, to the assimilating power of a southern influence. Slavery, as such, has no principle—it loosens all the evil passions of human nature. Its law is human will. The style of southern politics has accordingly been signalized by irresponsibility from the first. And the south has been steadily traveling northward, bringing its license with it, expelling the ancient time when merit reigned among us, and making us familiar with the lawless spirit of political adventure and rapacity. Our evil communications have corrupted our good manners, till now, the separation of politics from the fear of God, and the constraints of moral obligation is becoming national in our people.

It now remains to speak of the *consequences* of this fact.

Without this, we cannot fully understand its import, and shall not see the imperative need of a remedy.

We have not yet gone so far as to forget that God reigns in other matters, or that he is a being who vindicates his insulted authority by his judgments. He will do it here, also. Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by a law? God cannot endure a nation which cannot endure him. On the contrary, as surely as he is a just God, he will visit a people who reject Him and throw off his yoke, with his fiercest judgments. Shall I not visit thee for these things, saith the Lord—shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this? The prophets prophesy falsely, the priests bear rule by their means, and my people love to have it so, and what will ye do in the end thereof? Yes, when your country becomes wholly absolved in its reigning influences, from the fear of God, what will ye do in the end thereof? God himself shall answer in the very words that follow my text. When the people and their rulers shall say, Get ye out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us—he replies, Wherefore, thus saith the Holy One of Israel, because ye despise this word, and trust in oppression and perverseness, and stay thereon, therefore this iniquity shall be to you as a breach ready to fall, swelling out in a high wall, whose breaking cometh suddenly, in an instant. When once the politics of a nation become thoroughly separated from virtue and religion, the walls of order and of the civil fabric are broken; they are ready to fall, and no one can tell what moment that fall shall come. It must come suddenly, and may come at any instant. And it is the firm decree of God, verified by all the histories of empires, that no people whose public virtue is corrupted and gone, shall long survive his judgments.

But we will look at the subject as it stands in the more natural connection of cause and consequence.

In the first place, it is impossible that public law should long retain its sacred power, as a bond of order, after politics and legislation have become lawless. After we have learned to choose bad men, and justify wicked measures; after politics have become separated from truth and justice, and law-making is considered as only a part of the game for power and office, how long shall

we respect the laws? Who will receive, as sacred, the laws of a desecrated legislature? And after the legislatures have been desecrated, how long will it be, before the tribunals of justice will be also—how long before the judges and juries will sit as partizans? And then, after that, how long before faction will defy their sentence, and cease to ask redress at their hands? I can never think of this subject without trembling for our country. I see that the magic power of law, under which we are now sheltered in security, and take the repose of liberty, is wholly a **MORAL POWER**. It reigns because it addresses the moral nature. But the moment it becomes itself an instrument of license, and loses its uprightness, when the moral dies out of it, and the tribunals by which it is administered, the charm is gone. It is words only. Then come anarchy, faction, force,—all the floods of woe are loosed. Society is gone!

It will also be seen that constitutions have no value when moral constraints are expelled. Do not imagine that there is anything in constitutions that can restrain the functions of office, or avert the abuse of power. A constitution is paper only, and there is no power in paper to hold rulers to their place, or sustain the frame of a body politic. Constitutions have their efficacy and value in the fact, that there is conscience and good faith in men to observe them. Take away conscience; set party strife and discipline clear of the constraints of principle, and your constitutions have no avenger to maintain them; your civil order is dissolved and annihilated.

Nor is it possible that public love, or any warm and genial sentiment of patriotism should survive the destruction of moral and religious influences in the state. What room for patriotism is there in a state ruled by the devils of anarchy and party intrigue? Who will love his country, when his country ceases from equity and protection? And if a people do themselves become utterly reckless of principle in politics, and, in very deed, cease to see, in the state, anything but a strife for victory and power, what high sentiment of attachment to their country can possibly survive in their bosoms? Virtue, Religion, the sense of Law as the shield of God, extended over the homes, and dispensing justice between men—the fact that something reigns which partakes of the nature of Principle—this is the ground of valor and public love and zeal

for the public honor. The state must be considered as a moral fabric; it must have a head above its highest ruler. If it be not hallowed by an acknowledged religious connection with God, it is virtually a headless trunk, without warmth or earnest feeling—without life. Simply to have a professed atheist, or succession of atheists at the head of a state, would soon freeze every sentiment of public love into annihilation. How much more to have the whole spirit of politics in a nation become atheistic!

Furthermore, there is, in moral constraints and principles, a ligature of common sentiment, which is needed to preserve us from faction. The principles of virtue and moral obligation are one in all the parties of the state. If we are all subordinate to duty and to God; if we go to the same churches and tables of communion, receiving there the common principles and lessons of God's truth, and thence go forth to bless our country, as citizens, in obedience thereto—we may differ warmly and earnestly as to the mode, but we cannot be sundered into state factions. The law of the Lord is in us all, as it is in the firmament, conserving us in unity and order, partly by means of our opposite forces. Party becomes faction, when the opposition is total, and there is no tie left. And here is our danger. If we go on to cut ourselves loose, yet farther, from the great principles of right as enforced by God and the conscience; if we allow the bitterness of party strifes to drink up all that is common between us, and worthy of mutual respect; it will be very strange if we do not, ere long, dismiss the ballot box and try the sword. Then farewell forever to our country and its future liberties. Its history will be written by the side of that of Mexico—a history of faction, usurpation, insecurity and weakness—as contemptible to the world as it is miserable to itself. God forbid that Washington should have a monument in such a country! In mercy to his ashes the thunderbolts of heaven would dash it to the ground and shiver it in fragments.

In short, it is clear to any rational mind, that the divorce of politics from conscience and religion, of which I am speaking, must infallibly end, if not arrested, in the total wreck of our institutions and liberties. If there be any natural connection of cause and consequence, it can end in nothing else.

What, then, shall be done?—this is the great practical question

to which we are brought—a question which every good citizen, every lover of his country, every Christian, should ponder with earnestness and trembling of spirit—**WHAT SHALL BE DONE?**

Three things, I answer, must be done, and we cannot begin too soon. First of all, we must open our eyes to what we *have* done. We must see our sin, as a people, and repent of it with shame and fasting. As citizens and Christians, we must be willing to go before God, confess that we, as a people, have done wickedly, and ask Him to deliver us from the mischiefs we have already worked by casting off His law, and desecrating the principles of His throne. Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders; let the ministers of the Lord weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, as the common prayer of all, Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach! Then,

2d. Let every man take back his personality and set up his conscience, to do, in all public matters, what is right and well-pleasing to God. Require it of your rulers to cease from the prostitution of their office to effect the reign of their party. Require them to say what is true and do what is right, and the moment they falter, forsake them. At the same time, in the choice of your rulers, be determined to choose no man who is without character and virtue. If you have an eye that will look on a partizan without principle, pluck it out and cast it from you. If you have a hand that will vote for wickedness, cut it off. Hear the law of God, and swear that it shall be faithfully observed and kept. *Thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness, and place such to be rulers.**

First, let them be able men—men equal to the cares of government and policy. Think it not enough, with some who demand your vote, that a good man, a man of principle, is offered

*It has been soberly objected, that, as these are the words of Jethro to Moses, they are probably without any divine authority. I will not answer the objection. I simply name it as a phenomenon of the times, and as introductory to another, viz: that this advice to Moses respected the appointing power held by him in a *theocracy*, and may not, therefore, be applicable to us. That is—good men were needed in old times, but now we can do better! Not having God to be our national head, we can better dispense with able men. It is our republican privilege to choose the profligate and lawless, such as neither fear God, nor love the truth!!

to your choice ; there are many such whom God never made to rule the nation. Wicked rulers are not the only curse. Woe unto thee, O land ! when thy king is a child ; and God himself threatens it as one of his severest judgments against his people, that children shall rule over them. Besides, it is nothing but an insult to principle to set it up, beggared of all capacity in the candidate, and ask your vote because it is principle. There is no readier way to make principle itself contemptible. Choose able men.

When you come to the question of moral character, the answer is more difficult, or it has, at least, become so. I do not say, with some, that we are to vote for none but christians. There are many who do not pass by that name, who are governed by the fear of God, as truly as many who do. If we proceeded by this rule, we should make religion itself a partizan, setting it in public array as a wrangler for office and power, and thus render it odious to all who are not its disciples. The fundamental law which ought to govern us, I conceive to be this : That we have no right to set up in the government below, a man who is against the government above. If we do, we put our trust in wickedness, look to wickedness to defend our rights and constitutions, and expect that wickedness will do as well for us below, as God above—all which is a moral offence to God. We need not go into the heart—we cannot. But we must look for an outwardly right man, one who, in his manners and conduct, acknowledges what is right and good—a man of truth, integrity, principle ;—who fears God in his walk, who is just, pure, humane—in one word, *righteous*. We have no right in any case whatever to vote for another. Principle forbids it, and principle can bend to nothing.

We have a way of saying—I begin to hear it on all sides, and it seems to be taking the force of a moral maxim—that we must not require the men for whom we vote to conform to any moral standard, we must choose between evils, and take the least of the two. Whether this maxim is propounded in reference to an existing case or alternative, it is not for me to say. I leave you to judge. If it be, I will only say that I most deeply pity such an alternative. Merciful God ! has it come to this, that in choosing rulers, we are simply to choose whether the nation shall be

governed by seven devils or by six! Is this the alternative offered to our consciences and our liberties? Have we simply to choose between Sodom and Gomorrah? Hear the word of the Lord ye rulers of Sodom, give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. There is your standard—the *word* of the Lord, the *law* of your God. And whether we be of Sodom or of Gomorrah, let us go forth and hear and obey this law.

But you will say, if we do not choose the least evil, we endanger the success of the greatest—we do, in effect, vote for the greatest. That is not your fault, but the fault of those who offer you the alternative. You may choose between physical evils, and take the least. Half the wisdom of life consists in doing it. But in the case of moral evils, as between adultery and incest, blasphemy and perjury, murder and treason, you have no right to choose either, or the person guilty of either; and if you do, you are implicated, before God, in the choice you make.* There

*It has been objected, with some appearance of reason, that the argument here is insufficient. To choose either of two crimes is confessedly wrong; but how does it appear, it has been asked, that it is necessarily wrong to choose to office, *men* who are guilty of one or the other, or the least monstrous of the two. Perhaps my argument, in the discourse, is too much abridged to carry its full weight, and, as the point in question is one of great practical importance, I add here the following reasons to show that a bad man, or a notoriously wicked man, can, in *no case*, be voted for, without crime.

1. The word of God expressly forbids it, (Ex. xviii. 21,) and quite as decisively by implication, in the numerous passages which denounce woes and curses upon wicked rulers. How can it be right for us to choose men upon whom God denounces the most fiery judgments?

2. Every ruler is a man set in authority under God, and it is by virtue of authority under Him, that he is able to bind the conscience of the subject, for government without a moral force the conscience is a nullity. According to the true theory, we make choice of a ruler, by our votes; and when he takes the oath entering on the duties of his office, in that public solemnity, he is inaugurated, as the minister of God—clothed with a moral authority from God, to govern. When we choose a ruler, then, we do in reality offer him to God, to be His minister, to receive authority from Him and rule as under Him. And what less than an insult is it to God, to offer Him a wicked and profligate man?

3. There are always upright and good men who may be chosen to office; so that when we choose a profligate or wicked man, we express a *preference* of the latter above the former. We fall into the same sin as when we choose bad company, only in a more aggravated form. We commit the dearest rights and even the highest interests, to their charge and trust. We say to God and man—this is the very language of our vote—that we *had rather* trust the wicked than the righteous; which is the greatest possible wrong to virtue—such a wrong as no man can perpetrate, in any case, without sin.

4. It is impossible to choose any man to a high office, without kindling about his person a most ardent enthusiasm, and what men receive enthusiastically, they receive without caution, or restraint. The moral is hot, even to fluidity, and runs into any mold that is given it. The most disastrous and fearful thing, therefore, that can befall the interests of virtue in a nation, is to have a warm, and general enthusiasm kindled in the people, about a bad man. His crimes are sanctified and

was never a maxim more corrupt, more totally bereft of principle, than this—that, between bad men, you are to choose the least wicked of the two. The word of God in the rule just cited, expressly excludes it. It does not say that we are to choose for rulers the least impious and wicked of two—but such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness. And who is it that fears God? the man who is second in wickedness to the most wicked? Who is a man of truth? one who only is not as notoriously false as another? Who is clear of covetousness? the man who is only not as greedy of the spoils as another? Besides, if you wish to have this choice of evils offered you at every election, as long as the nation exists, you have only to bow your soul to it and do what is bid you. Grant that by withholding your vote in the case supposed, you allow the worse to triumph. You have not, of course, done evil to your country. Look to the remoter consequences and future effects. A vote is by no means thrown away because it does not go into the balance of the main question. Give it in as a visible token of innocence and incorruptible principle—*a piece of clean white paper*. Let it be known that bad candidates must lose so many votes—that they are not available—that there are so many righteous men who fear God and will not, therefore, support them. It is too much to ask that the good citizens only shall comply, and take the lead of the wicked. If a candidate is unavailable because he is a righteous man, let it be seen that he may also be unavailable because he is a wicked and ungodly man. This is wisdom—this is the true part of dignity—this is due to principle itself—this only will ever suffice to save our nation from the abyss of moral anarchy and the curse of God's judgments.*

made honorable; the youth are taught to emulate his character; the whole public mind and conscience is leavened and fouled by the admiration felt for the candidate. The public virtue of our nation will be so debauched, in a single year, by simply rallying about the person of a bad man, to give him their enthusiastic support, that all the ministry of the land cannot counteract the mischief, by many years of labor. Can it be right ever to risk such a danger?

Let these four arguments be carefully weighed, and no good man will ever dare to vote for a candidate who is notoriously wicked.

* My course of remark, on this head is so strikingly coincident with that of Dr. Beecher in his sermon on dueling, which I have fallen upon since my discourse was delivered, that I risk, among other charges, that of plagiarism. He says:

"But suppose the opponent of the duelist, besides his political heresy, to be a bad man also, and guilty of the same crime. If I do not vote for the man on my

Once more, you have a duty as citizens in respect to that dismal institution which is corrupting and blighting all that is fair and sound in the public virtue. Slavery is the curse of this nation; I blush to think how tamely we have suffered its encroachments. The time has come to renounce our pusillanimity, and take counsel of God and our own dignity. We have made a farce of American liberty long enough. God's frown is upon us, and the scorn of the world is settling on our name in the earth. No politician, no citizen who loves his country, can be blind to our shame and dishonor longer. We have let that thing, which our fathers would not name in their constitution, rule and overrule us, and be the characteristic of our country. It is poisoning all the elements of law, and dissolving the constraints of public virtue. And the question is now coming upon us, whether we shall not, by one more act of submission, ordain the perpetuity of this hideous power in our country, and give it a final and fixed predominance! I will not trust myself to speak on this subject. I have no words to speak what I feel. I will only say that if, by this treaty with Egypt, a new territory large enough for an empire is to be added to the domain of slavery, without some qualifications or restrictions that will neutralize the evil, our doom as a nation is, to human appearance sealed. God, I know, is gracious, and how much he will bear I cannot

side in politics, will not this be helping my antagonist, and will not this be as bad as if I voted directly? No. You are accountable for your own conduct only. If other people put into office bad men whom you could not keep out, but by voting for one equally bad, for their conduct you are not accountable.

"It is certainly a different thing whether a vile man come into power *by* your agency, or *in spite* of it. But suppose the duelist, in all respects excepting this crime, is a better man than his opponent, of two evils may we not choose the least? Yes, of two natural evils you may; if you must lose a finger or an arm, cut off the finger; but of two sinful things, you may choose neither; and therefore you may not vote for one bad man, a murderer, to keep out another bad man, though even a worse one. It is to do evil that good may come; and of all who do this the apostle declares, '*their damnation is just.*' What must we do, then, in those cases where the candidates of the parties are such, as that it would be sinful to vote for either of them? Vote for neither, and in future you will not be insulted by such candidates for suffrage. Let those who stand behind the curtain and move the springs, know that you have consciences, and that you will be guided by them, and they will take care that you shall not be compelled to throw away your votes."

He answers, also, another objection that may be made to the moral rule I have laid down,

"But it is difficult to know, in all cases, who are good men.' True; and will you, therefore, vote for them whom you know to be bad men? Rather, discard those whom you know to be bad men, and scrutinize critically the characters of those who profess to be good, and after your utmost care, you will be sufficiently exposed to deception."

tell. He is also just, and how long his justice can suffer, is past human foresight. We may never absolutely despair of the nation, till we see its pillars prostrate. But if we will obstinately hope, we must not be obstinately blind. And if we dare to look on the moral debauchery of this institution as an element of the political fabric, we cannot think it possible to make our country safe and happy in its liberties, as a perpetual slavedom. I intended to speak in closing, of the disastrous effects of our party politics, in their divorce from moral law and principle, on the general interests of religion and the church. This you will see at a glance. Our politics are now our greatest immorality, and, what is most of all fearful, the immorality sweeps through the church of God, and taints the very disciples of the Redeemer. Let us go to God this day, and ask him, with our earnest tears and supplications, in public and in private, to save our beloved country from its perils and avert the doom its sins provoke!